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WE THE DIVIDED

Partitions of Performance in the Ceramic State

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Abstract

The common association between theater and community is here inverted to explore the relationship between theatrical practice and immunity, or “affects of adjustment” between spectator and event. Drawing upon Roberto Esposito’s figuring of relations between community and immunity, on Jacques Ranciere’s propositions of the “emancipated spectator” and the part of those who have no part,” and Gerald Raunig’s conception of “Division” from his work on the *Dividuum* (2016), this essay examines a sequence of case studies central to the author’s own practiced experiences: Rotherhithe Theatre Workshop in the 1980s, Transhumance in the 1990s, and the Performance Biennial Athens in 2016. The dynamic here is to track an increasing scepticism about the social claims made for theater and ways of discussing performance that do not surrender to pseudo action in the absence of political commitment and change. The essay concludes amongst the Greek Attic Kraters of the 5th century BCE, curated from the Liverpool Museums at Tate Liverpool, contesting that the “ceramic state” continues at the interface between the continual promise of immersion and material histories of exclusion from the scene.

Keywords

affects of adjustment, community, ceramic state, curation, division, emancipation, immersion, immunity, participation, partition, performance, precarity, shame, spectator, theater

About the Author

Alan Read is Professor of Theatre and Director of the Performance Foundation at King’s College London. His books include: *Theatre & Everyday Life* (1993), *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* (2007), *Theatre in the Expanded Field* (2014) and *Theatre & Law* (2016). His written works for BBC Radio 4 include: *Plato’s Cave* (2012), *Dreadful Trade* (2014) and *Soul Estuary* (2016).



Fig. 1. Rotherhithe Theatre Workshop, Rotherhithe Street, 1983, Image by Alan Read

When I began my working life in the 1980s, I took a job running Rotherhithe Theatre Workshop, a dilapidated space for theater in east London. A decade of theater-making later, I wrote *Theatre & Everyday Life* (1993), a work that engaged with a whole range of urban sites, spaces, and places in which performance was occurring among a great diversity of individuals and groups. My subject was what I call a “lay theatre,” one that contests expectations of an exclusive, excluding profession by pursuing a project of “radical inclusion.” Radical inclusion was, itself, a response to a vicious crisis in urban democracy, as an unelected, Thatcherite quango, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), swept all—including our theater—before it. The LDDC, as it was trippingly referred to by all those subjected to its planning force, drove “home” the intentions of a Government intent on freeing up Europe’s “largest building site” from the “red tape” that had held back the efforts of previous administrations to open it up to urban redevelopment. This facilitated all-out assault on an area blighted by escalating unemployment, resulting from the removal of labor-intensive docking facilities from the Pool of

London, downstream, to Tilbury, where containerization was king. The dilapidated theater space that stood in Hope (Sufferance) Wharf bore the name of one of the very few warehouses open to those without license to dock; a nice irony, in that our very premises had always been open to all, irrespective of port permission, condition of vessel or identity of those on board.



Fig. 2. Canary Wharf, London, 2017, Image by Alan Read

Little did we know that what we experienced over those ten years was to become business as usual—a dark theater indeed. I was given an opportunity to reflect on the events of this period, at the Black-E Arts Centre Liverpool, during the city's Biennial 2015. What I did not say then, but will explore in what follows, was that, in recent years, I had begun thinking somewhat differently about social claims made for theater, without for a moment losing faith in that initial communitarian impulse fostered amongst so many others, for whom expression was not a cultural nicety. I want now to balance the voluntaristic optimism of my Biennial address, which often overcomes me when I talk about my *practice*, with something more

astrigent. I do this, in order to explore some vocabulary that might be useful in developing a critical discourse sensitive to the context provided by Tate Liverpool's Athens exhibition (2016), to which I will refer. Again I will be broadly talking about *theater*, which, anachronistic as that might now seem, is still what I do. I tend not to express myself through intersectional concerns (though these are critical) so much as the constantly shifting *dualisms* of language and action through which power operates most destructively. I first explored these ideas and words in a book called *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* (2008), where I proposed that claims for a special status for theater as a pre-eminently social, communitarian act, have long been exaggerated as a convenient means to defer, yet again, some more pressing questions as to why there is "never enough equality," however welcoming the theater act in its expanded form now seems to be. I went on to suggest, accurately and honestly, but rather too bluntly, that theater always—by definition—*fails* in its political aspirations.

Despite trenchant work by Jen Harvie (*Fair Play*), Shannon Jackson (*Social Works*), Claire Bishop (*Participation*) and Sonja Kuftinek (*Staging America*), there is still a largely unquestioned investment in the promise of "community" through cultural practice, that performance has adopted without nearly enough skepticism. This crystallized recently, when a student expressed to me how they felt *shamed* by their incapacity to relate with anything but suspicion, despite the companies' generous offers of inclusivity, to the participatory invitation of certain performance companies—including Punch Drunk, Fuerza Bruta, Rimini Protokol, Toneelgroep Amsterdam's *Roman Tragedies* and Shunt Theatre. They felt shamed, they said, by precisely the surprising force of their resistance to being separated from the larger group—"the audience"—in order, by their participation, to *perform* the putative democratic inclusivity of the spectacle. I suggest that that very expression of shame at wishing to remain among others, against the pull of inclusion in the theatrical realm, for the sake of something else, may touch a nerve among some of us: the articulation of such shame could act as a sober reality principle in our century-long celebration of the dissembling of theater's impervious borders.

I heard the French theorist, and hill farmer, Jacques Rancière address this, in a subsequently published talk given at the Sommerakademie (Frankfurt, 2004), during which he argued that,

[...] this attempt dramatically to change the distribution of places has unquestionably produced many enrichments of theatrical performance. But the redistribution of places is one thing; the requirement that theatre assign itself the goal of assembling a community which ends the separation of the spectacle is quite another. (15)

I am prompted by this, to argue, further, that collapsing that most obvious division of theater, by means of a theatrical invitation to leave one's seat, or place, to *participate*—to *join in*—has very little to say about, or do with, *emancipation* proper.

The hollow promise of “place changing” was exposed all too clearly by Gob Squad's performance of *Revolution Now* (Institute of Contemporary Art, The Mall, London, 2010; see Orr). *Revolution Now* is remembered for a series of failed endeavours to get people, passing on the street outside, to enter, and join the company for their staged revolution. For fully three hours, as we sat with the company, their efforts to entice “people” inside from outside—on the ceremonial Mall, close to Horseguards' Parade, where a different kind of resistance to revolution was daily underway—were met with indifference, insouciance and inspired idiocy. Given Gob Squad's track record in a knowing kind of meta-theatrical immersive performance, I took this to be their point. As a seated audience, reared on a diet of inclusionary media—from *Candid Camera* via *Dom Jolie* to *The Audience* itself—we watched a thirty-by-fifteen screen upon which images of these failed enticements to enter and join the revolution were thrown into stark relief. In response to such refusals, Gob Squad offered a performance that forensically demonstrated why the “rhetoric of participation” invoked by theater cannot provide any kind of serious exemplar or model, when it comes to questions of political engagement. Each evening, an apparent “success” saved the event from ignominy, when one willing, sufficiently radicalized, soul appeared. This random participant made the short walk inside, under the glare of a mobile camera unit, picked up a guitar, and howled a protest song to vitalize our action. Those who did this appeared suspiciously in tune with the proceedings, recalling supposedly chance encounters in reality television shows. The apparent distance of the latter Louboutin world from the former Live Art world should not obscure the reality that “revolution” is unlikely to come any time soon, from either.



Fig. 3. Occupy St Pauls, London, 2011-2012, Image by Alan Read

The condition for entry to a meeting might be an assumption of participation at a certain level of listening, or voting, or acclaiming, or indeed occupying. But, to *intervene* in events at moments when the reason of history has gone missing is to enter the *ongoing* scene of history, figured so beautifully in John Baldessari's montage works, *Crowds with the Reason of History Missing* (1983-1987). Here, swathes of onlookers are left beached at the edge of whited out spaces where historical events have been scalpelled out by Baldessari, leaving us to imagine what those looking on were looking on, on. These representations assert that political action demands doing more than stepping out of the crowd; it requires stepping out of the crowd, while fully grasping what it is we are partaking within—and at what cost—and, critically, what it is to step deliberately into something already happening, without apparent beginning or end.

These opening observations, in words and images, have to do, precisely, with what I understand as this moment of *division*. But if we are to explore this kind of vocabulary, for theater at the very least—if not yet for politics—we should be

careful to distinguish division from other things that it is not: neither partition nor participation.

Theater is a machinery of partition, a name given to a mode of striating time and space, of attributing and distributing parts to people, as to what is—and is not—accessible to their sight, hearing and senses. Rancière (*The Emancipated Spectator*) outlined his propositions concerning *partage du sensible* (distribution of the sensible), arguing that partition, in this sense, brings objects worthy of attention to a stage; for some, but precisely not for others, whose own experiences exclude them from community with those with theater in common. I explored Rancière's conception of "the part of those who have no part," in *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* (2008), so as to develop arguments about radical inclusion and material ontologies, and their implications for a theater, for whom the part of those actors who have no part is commonly, and apparently without irony, given the passive aggressive name, "resting." Most obviously the partitioning of theater space is seen to operate in formal seating arrangements for audiences: the assigning of appropriate places according to implicit and explicit regulations. For theater makers, partitioning is experienced most acutely in casting practices, in theater's competitive funding, and in its vigorously policed borders—between the professional and the profanity of the amateur, that threatens professionalism with its beautiful banality. These modes of partition become a procedure of counting and measuring like so many derivative bonds, bundled up and sold on: a hedge against the risk of some future solidarity that might undermine profits accrued from selling back to us therapeutic remedies for the catastrophic consequences of corporate cleavages.

The terminology of division has become ubiquitous in contemporary aesthetic and performance debates, not least as a way of accounting for the emergence of relational aesthetics. If division is not partition, neither is it *participation*, which might imply a relation to a *whole*, an entering into some social sense of wholeness—the active "taking of a share" in the whole, understood and recognized as such. Unlike partition, participation operates, not through separation and classification, but by means of a different economy of exchange, subordinating parts to that perceived whole. In this light, the student's shame might be thought of as coming from a felt resistance to leaving other spectators, constituted already in distinction to the partial stage, for a sense of a more demanding composite state: a kind of wholeness *between* act and audience.

Division, works quite distinctly to partition and participation, may be grasped, in its simplest sense, in a child's play on the seashore. Taking a stick in hand, they divide the beach from the beach, and then the beach from the sea, with a line that is always a continuation of another line that would appear to stretch as far as the eye

can see. One is always, as in John Baldessari's images, in the middle of such a line never at a point of beginning or end. This divide is what Gerald Raunig has called the "raging middle" of the "dividual," rather than the individual: the *dividuum*, in his words.

Division, then, is not a mathematical process dividing an existing whole into parts, it is not, like partition, a means to limitation and classification, and it is not a reference to a totality, as participation implies. The act of division divides, and consolidates, diffuse multiplicities that already are underway; it is a means of selecting a singular line from manifold materials sensed and available to us. Division in its diversity needs to be better understood, otherwise we, the divided will never understand our condition. Theater offers us an especially useful opportunity to reflect on such continuous geometries of division within the context of a dialogue on radical cultural responses to crisis in urban democracy. It seems reasonable to work on the assumption that if the diagnosis is one of *crisis*, and if the idea of democracy really is at stake, this will always be, in an important sense, a crisis concerning the terms by means of which the divisions of democracy are conceived, implemented, and experienced. In turn, this gives rise to important questions as to *whose* terms determine division, and, with what effect is division determined?

One form of urban theater has a peculiar symmetry with the city-state of Athens, and, cognizant, after Derrida, of the danger of sourcing the origins of anything from Athens, I would like to reflect on this, briefly, if only to consider some aspects of how theater and politics in Athens anticipated, and, arguably, shaped what followed. The specific context for this essay is a reflection on radical cultural responses to crisis in urban democracy, given at a symposium on that topic at the Tate Liverpool gallery (2016). The symposium was a response, in part, to Tate's exhibition of cultural artefacts as part of its "Ancient Greece Episode," so this reflection on performance, partition, participation and democracy, is shaped by the long reach of Athens' Shadow.



Fig. 4. Greek Vases in Tate Liverpool, 2016, Image by Alan Read

I refer to more than the shadow cast by the two-millennia-old vases exhibited at that time on Level One of Tate Liverpool, though they are long and fascinating, indeed, but also to the very contemporary shadow cast by Documenta's recent controversial arrival in an Athens devastated by neoliberal "austerity," in pursuit of a spurious project, *Learning from Athens*, 2017 ("Learning from Athens").



Fig. 5. Green Park, Athens, June 2016, Image by Alan Read

For myself, at least, the Athens Performance Biennial (2016), in which Gary Anderson (Institute of the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home) and I participated, was much more productive.



Fig. 6. Performance Biennial, Green Park, Athens, June 2016, Image by Alan Read

There, in Green Park, spontaneous performances of the most extraordinary kind operated as models of genuinely collaborative social force and creativity, taking their place among refugees,

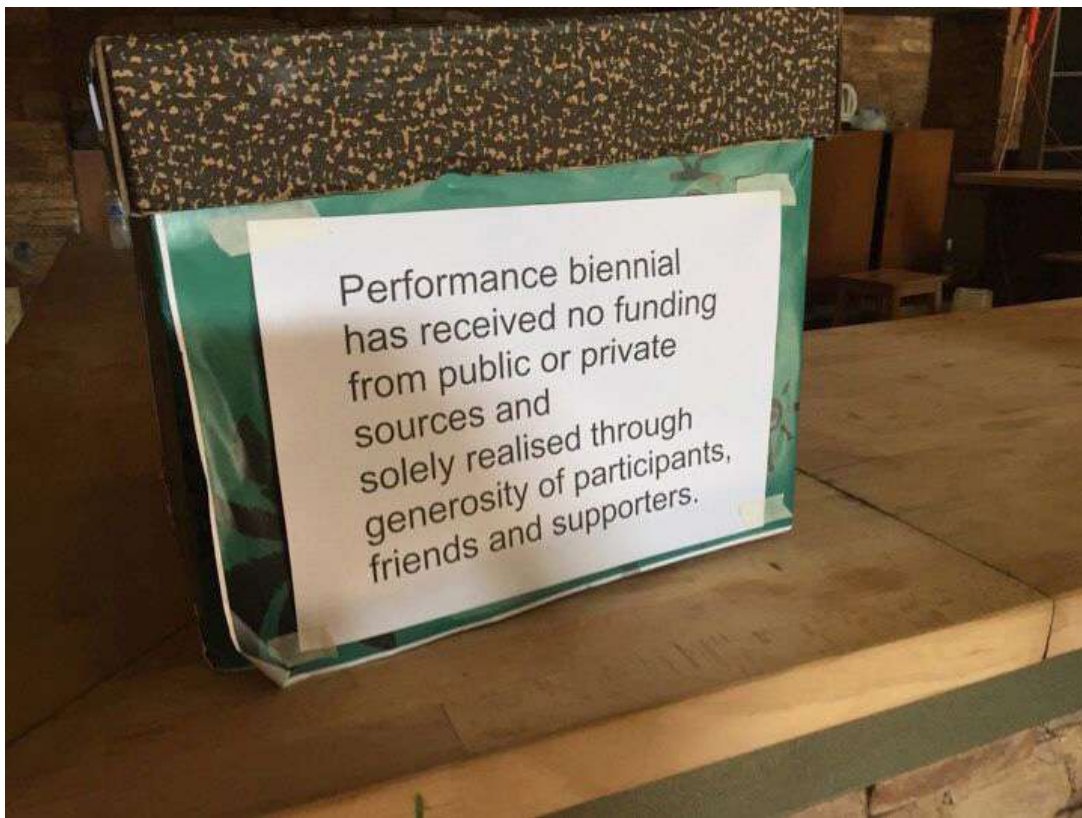


Fig. 7. Performance Biennial, Green Park, Athens, 2016, Image by Alan Read

at the heart of the most intense urban democratic challenge one might imagine in any “democracy,” not to mention the cradle of democracy.



Fig. 8. Customs Sign at Athens Airport, 24 June 2016

The power of that Athenian event prompted serious reflection on division, for many reasons. The day I arrived in Athens, June 24th, was the morning after the Referendum on Leaving the European Union in the UK had produced a slim—but democratically decisive—majority in favor of leaving the European Union.



Fig. 9. Newspapers covering Brexit in Athens, 25 June 2016

I was greeted with open arms by Athenian friends congratulating me for doing what they had not been able to achieve by way of resistance to the calamitous hegemony of German banks. “You have left! You have left!” they exulted, and some of them were weeping.



Fig. 10. Sheep Transhumance, Truinas, Drome, France, 2014, Image by Alan Read

When I somewhat sheepishly pointed out that I had, in that exercise, actually voted to *remain*, they simply and generously ignored my naivety and congratulated me anyway for leaving. Over the following days in Athens I could not fail to notice the presumptions of my Facebook feed, testifying to my membership of a predominantly metropolitan Southern England cultural constituency. None of those whom I count among the like-minded could have recognized the merits of what my Athenian hosts were saying. Neither did they seem to recognize the legitimacy of that voting majority, who when that moment for democratic division was offered to them, elected to divide along lines different to those that might have been expected by my social grouping. This obliged me to confront the reality that I belong to a group which, relative to many who voted to leave the EU, has gained disproportionately from the fruits of the boom of capital since deregulation in the 1980s: the very deregulation that buried our little theater in Rotherhithe.

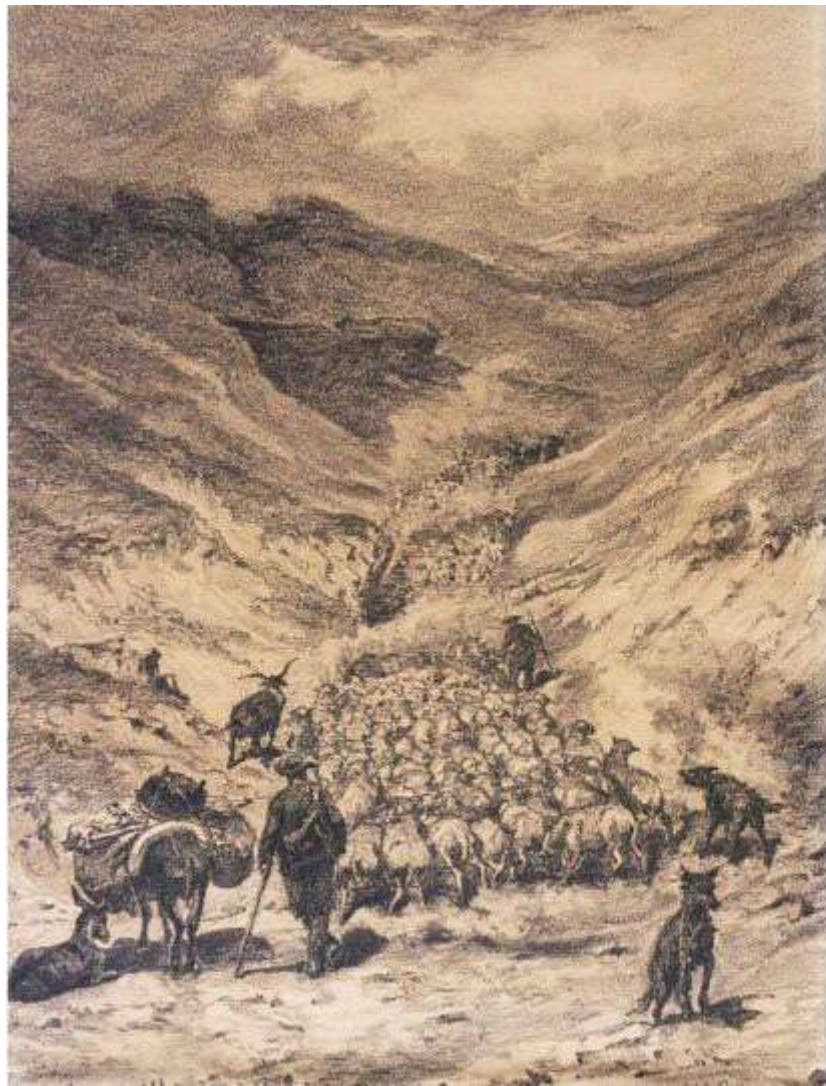


Fig. 11. Transhumance, Col de Rousset, Drome, France, Image Deiulefit Transhumance Archive.

How else indeed would I have been able to spend three decades writing about things as abstruse as the failures and disappointments of performance, the forms of assembly that sheep take in the transhumance, why a child waves from the stage at age five but never at eight? I always knew my privileges were secured at a steep cost to others, and some of those others had now crossed a line I had somewhat unquestioningly joined myself in 1975 with *my* first vote, in the Referendum on Joining the European Community, when *I* joined 67% of others who favored life inside what was then called the Common Market.

I learned something else about *division* while in Athens which I will consider in the second part of this essay: a consequence of division that has direct bearing on the terms of *any* cultural practice so fundamental are its effects. Once divided, the precariously—yet only ever temporarily—“isolated individual” seeks protection from contamination by the multiple from whom separation has been achieved. This again is starkly visible in the theater, and never more so than in classical Greek theater with its constant figuring of contamination by plague, often spoken by the chorus who look on, horrified, at individuals beyond their assembly—their number; which, if it is a chorus, must, by definition, be more than one.

Irrespective of the expansion of the spectatorial role that shamed my student friend, there remains in performance in general, and Greek theatre in particular, what I would call the “immunization paradigm” to protect us, the spectator, the audience, from the implication of involvement—once we have eschewed that opportunity for partaking. This is why Plato did not have to worry so much about the power of the poets in the Republic. Indeed the principle of *immunitas* over *communitas*, immunization over communization has been at work between life, politics and theatre throughout our recent urban history since the Greeks.

Immunization is a negative form of *the preservation of life*, nicely summed up later by Søren Kierkegaard, through his alter ego, Constantius, in the work, *Repetition* (1843). On his regular visits to the Königsberg Theatre in Berlin in the 1830s, Constantius cannot bear to share his theatre loge, his private box, with others. Or, more prosaically, now at Steve Tompkins’ Stirling Prize winning rebuild of the great Liverpool Everyman Theatre, down the road from where we are together/apart in Tate Liverpool, an audience member’s avoidance of the one free seat in the front row at the spectacle, however apparently distanced—and safe—from the contamination of the action. This anxiety of involvement and our efforts to insure against it are neatly demonstrated by this mobile phone text, from Kevin West, the sales manager of The Royal Court Theatre in London, notifying me as the tutor of a visiting class of students why one of those students would be asked to move from their seat upon arrival at the theater. It is not the courtesy of the treatment that is in question (the care is outstanding given the tickets were cheap), so much as the refined sense of personal space that is expected in this apparently public place.

Kevin writes:

Thanks for booking to see Bola Agbaje’s *Off the Endz* at the Royal Court Theatre on 9 March. You originally booked seats that included Stalls A5, but the director has requested that this seat be kept reserved for one of the actors, who jumps off-stage at one point in the play and would otherwise land dangerously close to you! We have therefore moved one of your party to the other end of the row, Stalls A18, which offers an excellent view of

the stage and joins up with the rest of your party (you already had Stalls A17), and I hope you will not be too disappointed with the change. Please accept our sincerest apologies for the last minute alteration.

The Latin word for gift, *munos*, lies at the heart of both *immunitas* and *communitas*, reminding us of the debt to others that we wish to resist. Immunity saves, insures, and preserves the organism, either individual or collective, from the threat of the *gift of community* that will require reciprocation.

I suggest the immunizatory logic of theater—the pathogen of performance—is the contract *we make*, as an audience member, at each stage of the disassembling of the stage, in successive efforts to democratize the theatrical realm. That is, our efforts to reassert the very protocols of distance *from* involvement, we thought we were paying to see dispelled. My proposal here is that this repertoire of *affects of adjustment* is what makes sitting in the dark watching illuminated stages so interesting. This is the “immunizatory logic” of theater, something that performance, in all its guises to the contrary, has really done little to destabilize, so powerful is its hold on us. And, in my view, this is the inherent *power of theater* that uses all its theatricality to unpick its own communitarian presumptions, its “social stupidity” you could call it if you were being polemical.

I suspect this is where the shame of that theater event was coming from for that student, or partly, the shame of an experience of sudden and inexplicable entropy in the face of an apparently generous invitation to *greater involvement* than their place within an assembly might have suggested was possible. For this generous invitation amounts to a reassertion at every stage of those places that were always ours and theirs. They: the whole; we: the divided. It is *this alienation* of we, the divided, that represents the indispensable condition of our own—essentially modern—identity as *alienated humans*; we would not be a *witnessing, human* audience if we were not feeling that shame of separation. Shame here, like other embarrassments in theatre witness, well documented by Nicholas Ridout in his shame-faced book *Stage Fright: Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* (2006), immunizes us from the excess of subjectivity that simultaneously *liberates* us from the threat of contamination from the whole, and yet, of course, *deprives* us of the experience we thought we were there for.

But, by way of a third and concluding idea, beyond these broad social diagnoses, the *real* leverage the immunizatory paradigm offers is in its tension with that great shibboleth of theater, the term *community*. As I have described it, immunity has a contrastive symmetry with community. Etymologically, *immunitas* is the negative, or lacking form of *communitas*, “One can generally say that *immunitas*, to the degree it protects the one who bears it from risky contact with those who lack it,

restores its own borders that were jeopardized by the common” (Esposito, *Bios* 24). Immunity is the fold that in some way protects community from itself, sheltering it from an “unbearable excess.” To survive, the community, *every* community, is forced to introject the negative modality of its opposite. It is the theater’s place I would suggest, quite literally, to provide that shooting up mechanism for the peculiar conditions that make immunity *from the prosecutions of performance* possible. It is this perverse dynamic that I assign as theater’s greatest social measure—indeed, perhaps, its only measure—as it, somewhat anachronistically, continues to thrive well into the 21st century, long after its repeatedly announced extinction.



Fig. 12. Greek Vases: Angelidakis Still from Film Installation, Tate Liverpool, 2016

And what does this have to do with those ceramic pots displayed in Tate Liverpool? Andreas Angelidakis uses film to consider such vases, comparing them to modern day newsfeeds and social media. I do not share Andreas’s diagnosis

for the pots, but I nevertheless make that division along a line, somewhere in the raging middle of what he has offered us.



Fig. 13.:Greek Attic Krater, c500-475, BCE, Liverpool Museums

There are no records of the earliest performances that would have been studied, they are literally pre-historic, but it is logical to assume that once the two-dimensional readings of “media studies” had developed, the *three dimensions* of “live performance” would have been recognized, commented on, and critically addressed for their contrasting depth and presence. To fancifully extend Philip Auslander’s (*Liveness*) logic that it was only at the inception of recorded television that the “live” became identifiable as a discreet and distinct activity, it was, in my view, only at the inception of the first media-screen that performance could be separated out and examined for *its* difference.

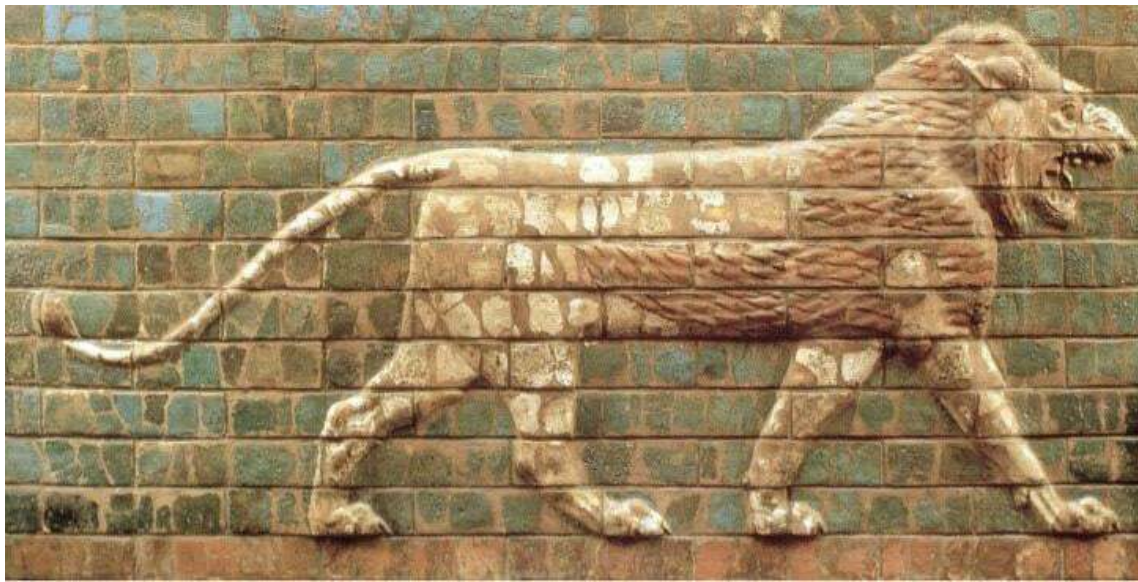


Fig. 14. Ancient Striding Lion, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Image by Alan Read

This happens around this moment. The invention of suspended narratives in mineral color and glaze produced in the fifteen-thousand-year-old new technology of the ceramic tile. It was *this* invention, a mass-produced media technology with the limit of a prototype glass screen that allowed commentators to distinguish between the repetitious, the mimetic and the bespoke for the first time.



Fig. 15. Architectural Tiles, Istanbul Mosque, Image by Alan Read

Some 2000 years later, by 1180 BC, in the Nile Delta, at the Temple of *Medinet Habu*, the tiles are picturing captured slaves of different races, fabulous beasts, real animals, and symbolic signs and ornaments. The age of narrative realism begins here, the veracity of the ceramic surface and its pictorial truth-to-life from now on set off against those things that happened in front of it, in true scale, in proximity to the spectator—not abbreviated in size, as demanded by the manufactured reduction of the mass-produced ceramic form.

The ceramic tile had the added dimension of a porous surface to its rear-side that promised some sort of permeability with the outside world. At least it was a porosity that allowed the tile to breathe with the surface to which it was attached, which in turn, would commonly be a wall with an exterior aspect and, therefore, prey to the vicissitudes of changing levels of damp and drought. So in the ceramic-tile we have the classic bonding of a surface of impermeable aesthetics founded on a promise of interactivity with the environment within which the work takes its place. This is why ceramic became the go-to material for vessels in use, the pottery breathed with its cooler exterior below ground maintaining the chill of the precious grape. The Liverpool Museums' collection of red-figure Greek vases,

displayed—and played with—on level one of Tate Liverpool represents the high point of this ceramic art. You might indeed want to call Athens (600 - 300 BCE) the Ceramic State, so ubiquitous had these vessels become.

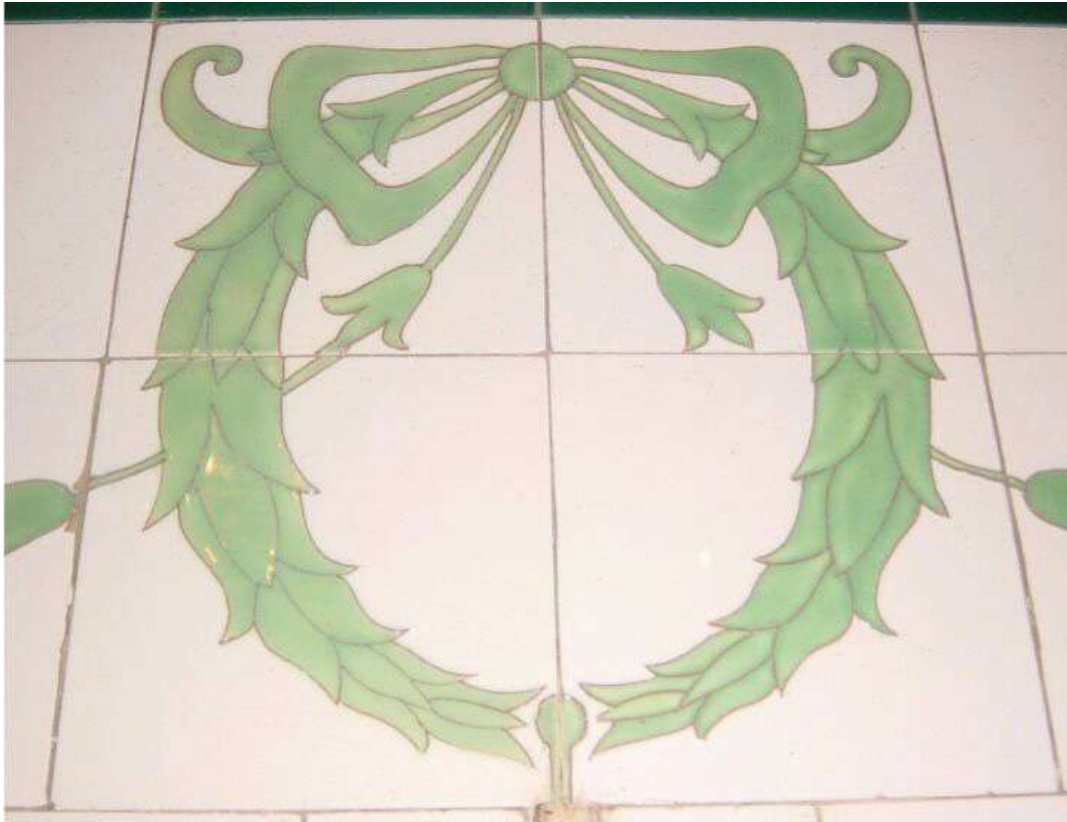


Fig. 16. Butchers Shop, The Cut, Young Vic Theatre Foyer, London, 2016, Image by Alan Read

But what does that really have to do with us now, if I am not going to take Andreas's line on the topical narratives of those vases being the equivalent of Athenian social media—or "Greek trolling," as he puts it? Well, for me the point is we are *still operating* within the ceramic state with serious consequences for our politics.



Fig. 17. Nintendo Gaming Console, 2009, Image by Alan Read

There is little fundamental difference between the Nintendos and iPads my daughters once gamed with in the early years of the inner lit screen, and the ceramic tile. They weigh about the same, and their dimensions—and opaque, milky hue—are familiar. The light now emanates from *within* the screen but the narratives are similarly suspended close to the near-side of that screen. And of course their easy violences—with titles like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call of Duty*—can be wiped clean with a single modest gesture across the surface. There is the tease of interactivity, but this, like almost all gaming, is fantastically limited. It is a remedial activity, rather like basket-weaving would have been in a nineteenth century home for the “insane.” And the porosity to the world of the tile has been traded for a specious *WiFi* link to other gaming slabs, but with little outside engagement.



Fig. 18. Proscenium Arch Theatre, Theatre Collection Archive, V&A, London

It would be the holy grail of interactivity to be in a position to announce this moment as the *end* of the ceramic state. Interactivity would provide us with the much-desired figure to consign the ceramic model to history. But there is little about the pre-photographic model of the theater, and its study, from the Greek site on, that disturbs this essentially two-dimensional model with a lustrous yet impenetrable surface and a porous back.

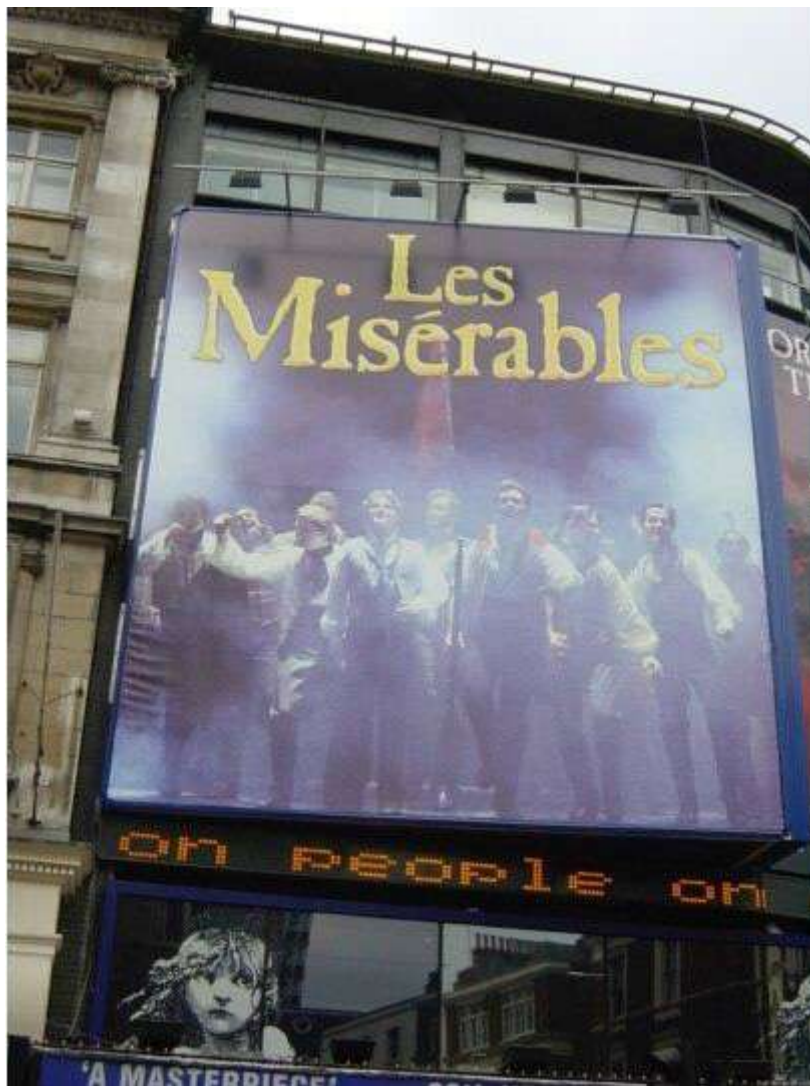


Fig. 19. Les Misérables, Queens Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, 2016, Image by Alan Read

The theater volume could be figured as leaky to the world but only from one side at a time and the proscenium arch reinforced the screen war in its face off with a front-seated audience; surfaces at work rather than volumes to be entered. The century long theatrical experiment that Rancière described as so many musical chairs, so many changing places—from Lissitsky’s space for Meyerhold’s production of *I Want a Child* in the 1930s through Jerzy Grotowski’s para-theatrical projects of the 1970s—to the current penchant for site-specific, relational and digital performance, has done little to alter the essential face-to-face encounter of that most perverse of relational arts, the theatrical. “Looking on” and wondering is

the common theatrical mode of spectation irrespective of cultural origin. It is by definition an art of anti-immersion, it is the *gloss on depth* incarnate.

This is *not* a problem for theater! My proposal here is that it is precisely this repertoire of affects of adjustment, the measurement of *resistance* to incorporation—as expressed by that student speaking of shame—that makes sitting in the dark watching the traffic of lit stages so interesting. Affects of adjustment are those physical pleasures, embarrassments, tics, seat-shuffling realignments that—despite philosophy’s allergy to “right measure,” since Holderlin—precisely position oneself in proportion to the spectacle that resists our presence. Most obviously they take hold with due regard for “an end”: very few leave a performance within its final movements; aware, as we are, of impending closure irrespective of signs to the contrary. Affects of adjustment, however, are subtle and continuous, and, in their ebb and flow, dictate the formations that we sometimes lazily ascribe to the unremittingly static term: “audience.” It is my contention here that it is this *impermeability* of the staged image, insouciant to our continuous movement (despite all Harold Pinter’s protestations at spectators’ coughing critically *at* his plays) like the glazed tile, that provides an apparatus for experiencing - time and time again - that most precarious of processes: what it is to be divided. For that is what we are: the divided.

We are the countless human beings whose ancestors include, among many others, those figures on the vases, whose ancestral lines we join in the raging middle. They are, after all, rather like some of us, simply embodied substances, codes of conduct mingled in things called bodies, inseparable from the outside world, actors in processes of mixing and separating, not least of all with the alcohol that would have been kept within those cooling vessels upon which they dance. Those figures are still, in their precarious pigment, their painted instability, in process of dividing and recombining.



Fig. 20. Greek Attic Vases in Tate Liverpool, 2016, Image by Alan Read

There can be no possessive individualism here, in the pots, nor in us, divided, composed, permeated by social relations and connected by things *as* we are, vulnerable and divisible.

Finally, perhaps the most obvious lesson of the conjunction of the In Athens' Shadow symposium and the Tate exhibition lies in the sense that the care Liverpool takes in its vases takes place on a direct line of relationship with the care it shows its people.

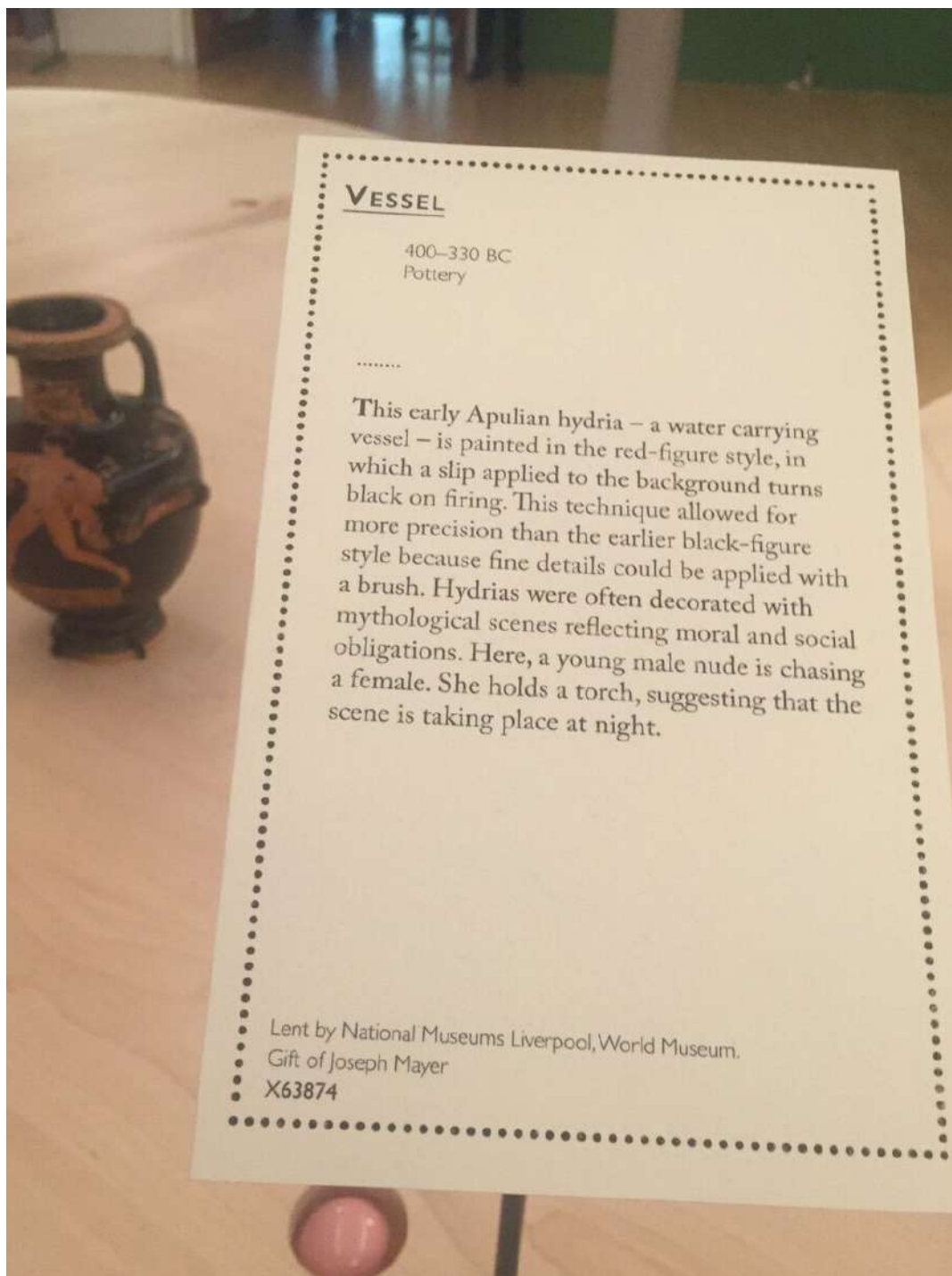


Fig. 21. Vessel Hydria, 400-330 BCE, Lent by National Museums Liverpool, Image by Alan Read

The beautifully exhibited vases demonstrate most explicitly the state's *ability* to protect the precarious, the state's *willingness* and *commitment* to protect the precarious. There is clearly much to be done for this care to translate to today's urban unemployed, underemployed, and exploited, whose precarity appears to lack the value of precious porcelain. That is one reason why beautiful places like the Liverpool Museums, from which the vases have been so generously loaned, *are important* and worth fighting for. In the face of assaults on urban democracy and the right to the city, they testify to an enabling role for the state: its capacity to enact a "conduct of care" for its people, which since the Greeks, has been given the name *curation*.

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